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Despite not having yet earned a dime in federal funding, Metra's proposed STAR Line connecting O'Hare International Airport with such suburbs as Schaumburg, Hoffman Estates and Joliet was among the big winners of a \$275 billion transportation bill approved by the U.S. House Friday.

Northwest suburban Cook County benefited in ways large and small from the 357-65 vote - the biggest being the conditional promise of STAR Line funding.

Nevertheless, both the bill and project have a few additional hurdles to overcome before a specific dollar amount is discussed, Rep. Mark Kirk said.

Mid-October is when the bill could be enacted into law. After that is when discussion would begin on a Full Funding Grant Agreement - the federal government's share of the project's \$1.2 billion cost.

"Though I may be asking for some planning money this year for the STAR Line to keep it going," Kirk added.

The project would build a commuter rail line west from O'Hare Airport along the Northwest Tollway. A switching station in Hoffman Estates would connect the new rail line to the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railroad, with commuter trains traveling to and from Joliet.

If the STAR Line had not made the cut Friday, that would have meant the House saw no place for it in its budgeting plans for the next six years, Kirk said.

Schaumburg Mayor Al Larson is among the Northwest suburban mayors who recognize the rail line as a potential economic engine for their communities - albeit one at least eight to 10 years off.

One stop on the line would be near Schaumburg's proposed convention center on Meacham Road.

"I think it's wonderful news," Larson said of Friday's vote. "I think it shows how valid the project is to legislators - the first transportation system in the country that will provide transit suburb to suburb rather than just to and from an urban core."

Nevertheless, through its connection to O'Hare Airport, riders of the STAR Line would be able to board the Chicago Transit Authority's blue line trains all the way into the Loop.

Other beneficiaries of the bill in the Northwest suburbs include:

- \$500 million for a western entrance to O'Hare Airport;
- \$144 million for the upgrade and extension of Metra's Union Pacific Northwest Line, including the improvement of signaling and the addition of an expanded coach yard in Johnsburg;
- \$5.16 million for the widening of Quentin Road from two lanes to four between Lake-Cook and Dundee roads;
- \$1 million to add turn lanes at the Arthur Avenue railroad crossing and the Prindel underpass in Arlington Heights;
- \$500,000 to build a information system providing motorists with real-time travel information on Lake-Cook Road between Rand Road and Route 41;
- An unspecified amount of funding for the resurfacing of Euclid Avenue in Arlington Heights between Walnut and Douglas Avenue.

Though never having vetoed any action by the Republican-controlled Congress, President Bush has threatened to veto the bill for being too large. He previously proposed a \$256 billion program.

The Senate recently approved a \$318 billion transportation plan - also threatened with a veto - which must be reconciled with the House's version before going to the president.

The margins of victory for both bills would be sufficient to override any presidential veto.